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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the 1974-75 term, Florida A & M University innovated the concept of the miniquarter. Its central purpose was to foster the development of the collegiate life styles, attitudes, motivations, and work-study habits almost absolutely demanded by competitive curricula. The idea appeared to be rational, relevant, and workable. However, its implementation fell considerably short of the original hopes, goals and plans. The results also suggest that to make the innovation work in the future, it must be supported by certain elements, such as: (1) administrative commitment and overt support by way of making the experiment official for the benefit of all administrators, staff, teachers and students; (2) ample information and inservice training for administrators, staff, faculty and student leaders; (3) making the miniquarter a part of the official calendar; and (4) provision of support services needed to communicate the overriding importance of the innovation as a significant academic program of the university, provided it can be done well and is deemed worthy of further experimentation. (Author)

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FLORIDA AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL UNIVERSITY
Tallahassee, Florida

NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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February 12, 1975

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Introduction

In growing from childhood to adulthood, the individual is faced with several major crises in his lifetime. One of those crises comes at the time he graduates from high school and begins his postsecondary education. Institutions of higher learning have attempted to soften the transitional shock by fostering various kinds of orientation programs.

For a long time, Florida A & M University has conducted an orientation program for freshmen. But the growth of junior colleges in Florida and the large number of transfer students have made it imperative for the University to add another dimension to its orientation program for new students. However, this report is concerned only with the program for freshmen.

Historically, freshman orientation has been rather conventional - placement testing, assemblies, counseling, tours, pep rallies, movies, dances, speeches, splash parties, etc. In addition to students, the New Student Orientation Committee for 1974-75 was made up of a former dean of women, a former dean of men, counselors in thedormitories and Counseling Center, and academic advisors.

According to the collective judgment of the committee, there was a great need to change the emphasis, nature and structure of the freshman orientation prog.m. The counselors

and academic advisors particularly thought that the extensive recreational emphasis of the previous program gave most freshmen the wrong idea of what college was like. As a result entirely too many of them got started in the wrong way and eventually failed, thus, adding to freshman attrition in the university. It will be remembered that the orientation period had previously begun Sunday evening, continued for a week, with registration on Thursday and a resumption of some of the earlier activities on Friday and Saturday.

The Committee's Recommendation

After long discussion of the pluses and minuses of the previous orientation programs, the committee recommended experimenting with a miniquarter for the fall term, including these features:

1. Sunday: General meetings, conferences with freshmen and parents
2. Monday: Biographical survey, academic placement assessment, information and academic advisement
3. Tuesday: Information and academic advisement
4. Wednesday: Registration. Buy books
5. Thursday: Miniclasses (T-Th schedule), use of library, buy books
6. Friday: Miniclasses (M-W-F schedule), use of library, buy books

7. Saturday: Fun in the sun

8. An official, printed schedule for freshmen only

Feedback

Around fifty years ago, Thorndike wrote that if a thing is worth doing, it is worth being evaluated to determine its goodness and effectiveness, or lack of these. It was with this idea in mind that an effort was made to evaluate the operational effectiveness of the miniquarter. To do that: (1) inspectional tours of the classroom buildings were made by the researcher; (2) discussions with students, teachers and administrators were held by the researcher; (3) deans were asked to meet with the teachers and department heads in their colleges or schools to discuss the miniquarter and to execute a questionnaire on its goodness, then, provide a composite rating for their colleges or schools.

The questionnaire was made up of ten items, five constituting a rating scale and the remaining five calling for supplementary information. The results from the five-point rating scale may be seen on the questionnaire, page 7.

It may be observed that "5" was the highest rating a feature could receive and "1" was the lowest rating it could receive. Four of the features received a rating of "2," next to the lowest possible rating. The fifth item on the

scale received a rating of "1," the lowest possible rating.

It was reported that class attendance was generally poor. The comments of individual deans, department heads and/or teachers throw some light on why, also why each of the items on the scale received such low ratings. Most of the comments are listed just as they appeared in the responses. They are as follows:

1. Excellent idea. Nonexcellent implementation. Should be kept and refined.
2. Earlier orientation sessions with students and faculty needed.
3. Brief seminar with faculty on purpose and implementation.
4. No one scheduled classes for Thursday and Friday.
5. Many teachers failed to meet classes because they did not know about the miniquarter curriculum.
6. Make certain through area chairmen and division heads that teaching materials are available for distribution to students at first class.
7. Need notices, etc. We only knew because we saw it on a copy of the New Student Orientation Program. No directives were sent to instructional faculty.
8. Teachers were responsible for teaching miniquarter, advising returnees and working on registration, all at the same time. This is frustrating for small faculties.

9. When we found out about the miniquarter, the teacher scheduled to teach our freshman had already been sent out of town to represent the school at another meeting. Furthermore, we only had one or two freshmen for the miniquarter. To sum up, there just wasn't enough information.

10. Advise persons involved as early as possible. Send list of students to instructors. Register freshmen in a block. Give them printed schedules Sunday night. Collect fees Monday and have miniquarter Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

11. Freshmen are already confused, as it is, and being more proficient in our initial contacts with them will assist in easing their frustrations.

12. One administrator who had a primary responsibility for implementing the miniquarter was overheard telling others it was illegal to require freshmen to put in this "extra" time.

13. Some of the freshmen actually objected to the miniquarter because it had not been a part of the academic requirements in previous years.

14. In discussing the innovation at the last meeting of the faculty preplanning conference, and officer said that students were being encouraged to attend their classes and the officer hoped the teachers would meet them as scheduled. "That did it."

Summary and Conclusions

At the beginning of the 1974-75 term, Florida A & M University innovated the concept of the miniquarter. Its central purpose was to foster the development of the collegiate life styles, attitudes, motivations, and work-study habits almost absolutely demanded by competitive curricula; thereby enhancing the chances of freshmen for academic survival, orderly progression, retention and graduation.

In the beginning, the idea appeared to be rational, relevant and workable. However, as the results indicate, its implementation fell considerably short of the original hopes, goals and plans. The results also suggest that to make the innovation work in the future, it must be supported by certain elements, such as: (1) administrative commitment and overt support by way of officializing the experiment for the benefit of all administrators, staff, teachers and students, (2) ample information and inservice training for administrators, staff, faculty and student leaders, (3) making the miniquarter a part of the official calendar as listed in the catalogue, (4) provision of support services needed to communicate the overriding importance and centrality of the innovation as a significant academic program of the University - provided it can be done and it is deemed worthy of further experimentation.

THE END

Followup Questionnaire on Mini Quarter
September 24, 1974

1. How well <u>understood</u> by the instructors and counselors were the concept and purpose of the miniquarter?

5	4	3	(2)	1
Thoroughly	Well	Moderately	Poorly	Not at all

2. How well <u>understood</u> by the freshmen were the concept and purpose of the miniquarter?

5	4	3	(2)	1
Thoroughly	Well	Moderately	Poorly	Not at all

3. How well <u>accepted</u> by the instructors and counselors were the concept and purpose of the miniquarter?

5	4	3	(2)	1
Thoroughly	Well	Moderately	Poorly	Not at all

4. How well <u>accepted</u> by the freshmen were the concept and purpose of the miniquarter?

5	4	3	(2)	1
Thoroughly	Well	Moderately	Poorly	Not at all

5. How do the teachers and counselors rate the response of the freshmen in your area to the requirements of the miniquarter?

5	4	3	2	(1)
Excellent	Outstanding	Good	Fair	Poor

6. How well do you think the teachers in your area met their classes? (for deans only)

7. What was the enrollment and how many of the freshmen in your area attended their classes on Thursday? Enrollment_____ Attended classes_____

8. What was the enrollment and how many of the freshmen in your area attended their classes on Friday? Enrollment_____ Attended classes_____

9. What were some of the problems which hindered a smoother operation of the miniquarter this year?

10. What suggestions can you make for enhancing the (1) understanding, (2) acceptance and (3) operation of the miniquarter in September 1975? (registration, staffing, fees, financial aid, books, equipment, materials, outlines, attitudes of teachers, administrators, and students, etc., etc.)